

ALBERT M. VOLLMER: A MEDICAL DOCTOR  
WHO LOVED LILIES

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Albert M. Vollmer was born May 14, 1896 in San Diego, California, attended Pomona College as a premedical student during the academic year of 1916–17, served in the U.S. Naval Reserves in 1917 and 1918, and returned to Pomona for the academic years 1918 through 1920. He then entered the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and received the M.D. degree in 1924. He was an intern at St. Luke's Hospital in San Francisco in 1924–25, was at Sloane Hospital for Women in 1925–26 and took the National Board examinations in 1926 and served as Visiting Obstetrician and Gynecologist at the San Francisco Hospital in 1926–27. Later he was Chief Obstetrician and Gynecologist at St. Luke's Hospital and was on the staff of Franklin Hospital in San Francisco, and Associate Clinical Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of California. He was a member of the American Medical Association and of the Pacific Coast Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

By the early 1930's "Mike", as he was known among his friends, had developed a keen interest in the native lilies of California; and he had spent many weekends and vacation periods scouring the state and adjacent Oregon in search of stands of lilies, from which he collected bulbs and seeds to propagate in his San Francisco home garden. I met him through the kind offices of Dr. Philip Leighton, Professor of Chemistry at Stanford, and from 1937 onward for a bit more than a decade accompanied Mike on field trips throughout California, four lengthy trips into Baja California, and one into northern Sonora and southern Arizona.

Mike corresponded with many others who held intense interests in lilies, both in the United States and abroad. Among these correspondents was Dr. Samuel L. Emsweller, who was Principal Horticulturist in Charge of Ornamental Plants in the experimental gardens of the U.S. Department of Agriculture at Beltsville, Maryland. Mike was instrumental in getting Emsweller to visit California in search of lily seeds and bulbs on four or five different occasions. Mike also collected additional seeds and bulbs, which he forwarded to Beltsville in support of research there on propagation and culturing of these plants

and of investigations of the diseases that frequently made it very difficult to grow certain species in gardens and greenhouses.

Mike was very careful to avoid digging large numbers of bulbs and, whenever possible, preferred to collect seed instead of, or in addition to, a small number of bulbs. He was acquainted with Carl Purdy and obtained some material from that dealer, but disapproved of Purdy's practice of digging large numbers of bulbs of various liliaceous plants. More than once Mike made three or four separate trips to a particular locality in order to obtain mature seeds from a threatened stand of lilies rather than dig any bulbs whatever. Furthermore, he took pictures in color with both still and moving picture cameras in order to preserve information about habitats of the plants.

In commenting upon the work Emsweller was carrying forward, Mike wrote, "Anyone who has tried to grow the California lilies has discovered that some are difficult and fail to become established. Dr. Emsweller has had this experience, and for him this was a challenge. The first step in solving this problem was to get firsthand information, resulting in field trips, to see the lilies growing in their native habitats, listing the associated vegetation, and terrain in which they grow, rainfall, variations in temperature, growing season, collections of samples, culturing the soil, digging bulbs, collecting seed and raising them from seed. He is the only person who has seen all the American lilies growing in their native habitat".

Mike was instrumental in helping Emsweller find several rare California lilies growing in the field, and in returning later to collect seed after they had found only plants in bud or with immature capsules. He carried on this field work while serving an active practice from his office on Post Street in San Francisco and attending patients in the hospital!

When my appointment as Scientific Director of the Arctic Research Laboratory took me away from Stanford for several years, Mike assumed active support of the work of a graduate student at Stanford, Mr. Lawrence Beane, who had planned to work beyond his Master's degree, but circumstances made this plan impracticable. However, Larry continued to hold a keen interest in lilies, and he and Mike made a number of extensive field trips to isolated localities in the state so Larry could see the plants under natural conditions and paint them from fresh material.

As an outcome of these expeditions Lawrence Beane published a paper in which he and Vollmer jointly named two new species of *Lilium*, and Larry made three new combinations, supplied a new name for a previously published variety, and recognized a specific name proposed in 1930 by Marcus E. Jones. The last entity had been considered no more than a synonym by most California botanists (Beane, 1955).

Dr. Vollmer also collected herbarium specimens of most California lilies that he had originally collected for propagation, and sent much material to the California Academy of Sciences, the University of California, Stanford University, and to the U.S. National Herbarium in Washington, D.C. He collected and cultivated representatives of such genera as *Calochortus* and *Fritillaria* and of several species within the Amaryllidaceae.

Dr. Vollmer published several papers in the *Lily Yearbook* and in garden journals. In these papers he contributed substantially to knowledge about geographical distribution, soil requirements, and flowering periods of our native lilies (Vollmer, 1954, 1956, 1959). The 1956 paper was presented in person, along with colored moving pictures of many of California's lilies, before the Royal Horticultural Society in London.

It seems appropriate that recognition should be given to the excellent field work carried on by Dr. Vollmer, to the support he gave so generously to professional botanists, and for his devotion to saving the native stands of lilies in our state. I wish that such recognition might have been provided before Mike's death in the spring of 1977, a few weeks before his 82nd birthday. He was a staunch friend who supported my field operations through a decade, and took me to several out-of-the-way lily localities in California.

I thank Dr. John H. Thomas for suggesting that I prepare this tardy tribute to Albert M. Vollmer, an enthusiastic student of native liliaceous plants, and a keen observer of their characteristics.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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